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THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL UNDER THE KINGDOM¹

This is a serious piece of work demonstrating how much we may still learn from the great prophets of the eighth century B.C. The author chooses a definite period of Israel's history and seeks to understand its religion. He limits himself to the sources for this period. Beginning with the Pentateuchal writers J and E, he discusses early prophecy, and then takes up Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy. He uses the results of criticism throughout, and if the old reproach that the higher criticism is negative and destructive is ever uttered again, we shall be able to refute it by pointing to this positive and constructive study as a sufficient refutation. My own choice would have been to include Jeremiah in the discussion instead of Deuteronomy. But Deuteronomy doubtless belongs in the period, though it introduces a new stage of religious thought. Perhaps the author will at some future time give us as suggestive a study as this, making Jeremiah the subject.

The period of the kingdom is especially instructive because of the interplay between the religious and secular life of Israel. Our modern separation between church and state is unknown to the ancient world. Religion, in Israel at any rate, was a part of the life of the people, a social phenomenon, and the people never thought of it as something apart from what we call secular interests. The movement which united the tribes of Israel against their foes and made them into a nation was a religious movement. The Pentateuchal narratives were gathered and recorded because the consciousness of Israel's religious unity gave interest to the traditions of Israel's ancestors. "What gave JE the influence it possessed and still possesses is not that which it has in common with other faiths: What caused Israel to preserve the account, and what forms its charm to men still is its simple and direct presentation of certain great religious truths which made Israel what it was, and which it was Israel's glory to hold for the world" (p. 6).

From this point of view J and E belong in the group of prophetic writers. In one important respect, however, they differ from the great prophets whose words have come down to us. They (J and E) are apparently satisfied with the popular religion and dwell lovingly on its authentication by the forefathers. The prophets, on the other hand, protest against the ritual, and in the name of Yahweh himself denounce

¹ *The Religion of Israel under the Kingdom.* The Kerr Lectures delivered in the United Free Church College, Glasgow, during Session 1911-12. By Rev. Adam C. Welch, Theol.D. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912. Large 8vo, pp. xvi+305.

the worship offered to Yahweh. It is this sharp denunciation which unites Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. And the motive common to the three is the ethical motive—Yahweh requires kindness rather than sacrifice and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering. The prophet, says our author, “does not speak in the name of a law which has already been recognized, for the difficulty of the situation was that there was no such law which received an equal recognition by all. He speaks in the name of the outraged Jahveh, who is the ultimate guardian of all justice and right” (p. 53).

The illustration of this theme is given in the detailed discussion which follows, one chapter being given to each of the three great prophets. Did space allow, I should be glad to quote at length, but it will be better for the reader to go to the book itself. From the concluding chapter (on Deuteronomy), however, I may venture to cull a sentence or two. The author, of course, accepts the critical theory concerning the date of the book. He says: “The reason why a reform which appealed to the whole people and represented the aims of all religious men in the community could be carried through in Jerusalem is found in the fact that in Judah the alliance, in the sense of community of ideals, between prophecy and priesthood had always been closer than it was in northern Israel” (p. 193). He goes on to show that this community of ideals showed itself in the Deuteronomic adoption of the cultus. The prophets in their opposition to the ritual had failed to realize that some form of worship is essential to the common man. The Deuteronomists are not willing to break the historic continuity expressed in the popular religion. They desire to remold the national institutions in order to make these the worthy means by which men may express their sense of the will and nature of their God. While therefore Deuteronomy represents a compromise in which the ideals of the prophets lose something of their loftiness, yet the compromise was a necessity if the aims of the prophets were to be even partially realized.

In a few instances the reader will question whether the author has not read into his sources more than they actually contain, but on the whole he will find here an illuminating and instructive discussion.

HENRY PRESERVED SMITH

MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL
MEADVILLE, PA.